

“FOREVER WITH THE LORD”
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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“To be with Christ, which is far better.”
Philippians 1:23.

THE apostle was confined in the guardroom of the Praetorian. It is very probable that he had a soldier chained to his right hand, and another to his left and it is very possible that this position suggested to him the expression, “I am in a strait betwixt two.” He was literally held by two forces, and he was mentally in the same condition, exercised with two strong desires, influenced by two master passions, and he did not know to which he should yield. He says, “Between the two I am in perplexity,” or, as some render it, “I am straitened by the pressure of the two things.” Picture yourself sitting in a gloomy dungeon, a captive in the hands of the cruel tyrant, Nero, and under the supervision of the infamous prefect, Tigellinus, the most detestable of all Nero’s satellites. Conceive yourself as expecting soon to be taken out to death—perhaps to such a horrible death as the refined cruelty of the monster had often devised, as for instance, to be smeared over with bituminous matter, and burned in the despot’s garden to adorn a holiday. What would be your feelings? If you were not a Christian, I would expect you to tremble with the fear of death, and even if you were a believer, I would not marvel if the flesh shrunk from the prospect. Paul was an utter stranger to any feeling of the kind. He had not the slightest dread of martyrdom. He calls his expected death a departure, a loosening of the cable which holds his ship to the shore, and a putting forth upon the main ocean. So far from being afraid to die, he stands fully prepared. He waits patiently, and even anticipates joyfully the hour when his change shall come. On the other hand, I can readily imagine that amidst the miseries of a wretched prison, subject to frequent insults from rude soldiers, you might be seized with a desire to escape from life. Good men have felt the power of that feeling. Elijah said, “Let me die: I am no better than my fathers.” Job sighed to be hidden in the grave, and oftentimes under far less afflictions than those which vexed the apostle, good men have said, “Would God this life were at an end, and these miseries over; I am weary, I am weary; when will death release me?” I see nothing of that feeling in the apostle. He is not restive under the chains. There is not a trace of impatience about him. He admits, and joyfully admits, that to be with Christ is far better. But upon consideration, he sees reasons for his remaining here, and therefore he cheerfully submits to whatever may be the Lord’s will. He does not choose. His mind is so wrapped up with God, and free from self, that he cannot choose. What a blessed state of heart to be in! One might be willing to wear Paul’s chains on the wrist to enjoy Paul’s liberty of mind. He is a free man, whom the Lord makes free, and such a man, Nero, cannot enslave. He may confine Paul in the military prison, but his soul walks at liberty through the earth, yes, and climbs among the stars. Paul, instead of being either weary of life or afraid of death, sits down and coolly considers his own case as calmly, indeed, as if it had been the case of someone else. Do you observe how he weighs it? He says to depart and to be with Christ is, in itself considered, far better, he therefore desires it. But looking round upon the numerous churches which he had formed, which in their feebleness and exposure to many perils, needed his care, he says, on the other hand, “To abide in the flesh is more necessary for you.” He holds the balance with unquivering hands, and the scales quietly vibrate in equilibrium—one rises, and then the other, gently swaying his heart by turns. He is in a strait, a blessed strait betwixt two, and he does not say that he knew not which of two things to avoid, or which to deprecate, but his mind was in such a condition that either to live or to die seemed equally desirable, and he says, “What I shall *choose* I know not.” It is a poor choice, to choose to live in a dungeon, and an equally poor business, as men judge it, to choose to die, but the apostle re-

gards both of them as choice things, so choice that he does not know which to select. He deliberates as coolly and calmly as if he were not at all concerned about it. And indeed, it is fair to say he was not at all concerned about it. He was moved by a higher concern than any which had to do with him, for his main objective was the glory of God. He desired the glory of God when he wished to be with Christ. He desired the same when he was willing to remain with Christ’s people and to labor on.

His mind, as we have seen, hung in equilibrium between two things, but he is clear enough upon one matter, namely, that considering his own interests, it would greatly increase his happiness to depart and to be with Christ. He had said the same before, when he declared that, “To die is gain.” He had no doubt that to be loosed from the body, and allowed to fly away to Jesus would be a great blessing to him. Of that assurance we will now speak.

I. The first thing to which I shall call your attention is THE APOSTLE’S CERTAINTY CONCERNING THE DISEMBODIED STATE—“Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” Now, the apostle was an eminently conscientious man. At the time when he was a Jewish teacher, whatever else he might not be, he was very conscientious—he verily thought that he did God service in persecuting the Christians. And throughout the whole of his subsequent career, in every incident of his history we mark him as pre-eminently a man guided by conscience. If he believed a thing to be right, he attended to it. And if anything struck him as being wrong, he could not be persuaded to countenance it. He would not do or say that which he did not fully believe to be right and true. It is a grand thing to meet with a witness of this order, for his testimony can be relied upon. What such a man affirms we may be quite certain is correct, so far as he knows.

And also, the apostle was eminently cool. He was a man of well-balanced reason. I should think that logic greatly preponderated among his faculties. John has a warm and glowing heart, and one does not wonder that he is rather a warm lover of Jesus than a systematic unfold of doctrine. Peter is impulsive, and when he writes, he writes with force, but it is not the force of reasoning. Paul is calm, collected; you never find him excited beyond the bounds of reason. He is as orderly, correct and argumentative as a Grecian sage. He is enthusiastic to a white heat, but regardless, he still holds himself well in hand. The steeds of his imagination can outstrip the wind, but he always holds the reins with a strong hand, and knows how to turn them, or to make them stand still at his pleasure. It is a great thing to receive the testimony of a man who is both conscientious to tell what he believes to be true, and calm and logical to form a clear judgment as to what is really fact.

Now this man, Paul, was convinced that there is a future state for believers. He was quite sure about it, and he believed it to be a future conscious state which commenced the moment one died, and was beyond measure full of blessedness. He did not believe in purgatorial fires through which believers’ souls must pass. Much less did he believe the modern and detestable heresy which some have endorsed that, like the body, the soul of the saint dies until the resurrection. But he was known to speak of being “absent from the body, and present with the Lord,” and here he speaks about departing not to sleep or to lie in the cold shade of oblivion till the trumpet should awaken him, but to depart, and immediately to be with Christ, which is far better. What had made this very conscientious and very collected man come to this conclusion? I suppose he would have replied, first, that he had been converted by a sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the road to Damascus, while desperately set against the religion of Jesus, the Lord Himself had appeared to him, so that he had seen Jesus with his own eyes, and had heard Him speak. About that sight and sound he had no question. He was sure that he had seen the Lord Jesus and heard His voice. He was so certain of this that he was led to give up his position in society, which was a very elevated one, to lose his reputation, which he greatly valued; to be rejected by his countrymen whom he loved with more than ordinary patriotism, and to run continual risk of death for the sake of the truth to which he was a witness. He was content to be made the offscouring of all things for the love of that once-despised Savior who, out of the windows of heaven, had looked down upon Him in mercy. Now, he was quite sure that Jesus Christ came from somewhere, and went back to some place or other. He felt sure that there must be a place where the man, Jesus Christ, dwelt and he felt quite certain that wherever that might be it would be a place of happiness and glory. Recollecting the prayer of the Lord Jesus,

which John had recorded, “Father, I will that they, also, whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory,” he was quite certain that as soon as saints died, they would be where their glorious Lord Jesus was, and would share His honors.

Remember, also, that this judicious and truthful witness tells us that he had, on other occasions, distinct evidence of the disembodied state. He informs us that he was caught up into the third heaven, and there heard things which it was not lawful for a man to utter. He observes that he does not understand how he went there, but of the fact, he is quite sure. His body was here on earth still alive, and yet his spirit was caught away into heaven. The question with him was whether he was in the body or out of the body, and I dare say his metaphysical mind often tried to untie that knot. His soul must have remained in the body to keep the body alive, and if so, how could it go up to heaven? And yet he was quite clear that he had entered into heaven. At last the apostle came to the conclusion that whether in the body, or out of the body, he could not tell, but God knew. This, however, he was sure of, that he had been caught up into paradise, or the third heaven, and therefore there was a paradise. He had heard words which it was not possible for him to utter, therefore there was a place where glorious words were to be heard, and glorious words to be said. And he was quite sure, not merely as a matter of belief, but as a matter of observation, that there was a place into which disembodied spirits go, where they are with Jesus, their Lord, which is far better. It is clear that it would not be far better for a saint to die and sleep till the resurrection, than it would be to work on here. It would be evidently, by far, a better thing for saints to continue in life till Christ came, than to lie dormant in oblivion. Yet he says it is far better for them to depart, and the ground of his judgment lies in the fact that there is a place of real happiness, of intense joy, where it is far better for the disembodied spirit to be than for it to remain here in the body. About this Paul expressed no sort of doubt. There was such a state. It was a state of great joy so that, even to him who was one of the greatest apostles, the most useful of the saints, and the most honored with his Master’s blessing—even to him to depart and to be with Christ would be far better.

I want you also to notice that he does not express any sort of doubt about his own entrance into a state of happiness as soon as he should depart. He does not say, as I am afraid many here would have done, “It would certainly be far better for me to die if I were sure I would be with Christ.” Oh, no. He had risen above such hesitation. Dear brethren, it is a wretched state to be in, to be saying, “It would be sweet for me to depart, if, indeed, these glories were for me.” He had got beyond all doubt as to whether eternal bliss would be his. He was sure of that, and why are we not sure? Why do we hesitate where he spoke so confidently? Had Paul something to ground his confidence upon which we have not? Do you suppose that Paul reckoned he would be saved because of his abundant labors, his earnest ministry, and his great successes? Far from it! Don’t you know that he, himself, said, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”? As for anything that he had ever done, he declared that he trusted to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith. Now, where Paul built, we build, if we build right! Our hope is founded upon the righteousness of Christ, upon the grace of God, upon the promise of our heavenly Father. Well, I dare to say it, Paul, the chief of the apostles, had not a solitary grain of advantage over any one of us as to the basis and essence of his hope. Mercy, grace, atoning blood, the precious promise—these, alone, he built on, for other foundation can no man lay. If Paul was sure of eternal bliss, I should be sure of it, too. No, I am! Are you, beloved? Are you equally as sure of being with Christ as Paul was? You should be, for you have the same reason for certainty as the apostle had, if, indeed, you believe in the Lord Jesus. God is not a God of perhapses, and ifs, and buts, He is a God of shalls and wills, of faithful truth, and everlasting verities. “He that believes on Him is not condemned.” “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” “Who shall lay anything to the charge of”—whom?—Paul, the apostle? No, but “God’s elect!” Of all of the elect, of any one of them whom you shall please to select, however humble, however obscure—they are all safe in Jesus. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, and we may, each one of us cry, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which

I have committed to Him until that day.” So much, then, concerning the apostle’s certainty as to the disembodied state, its happiness, and his own possession of it before long.

II. It is very interesting to notice THE APOSTLE’S IDEA OF THAT STATE. He says, “To be with Christ.” It is a one-sided idea, and it is almost a one-worded description of it: “To be with Christ.” I have no doubt Paul had as enlarged ideas as to what the state of disembodied spirits would be as the most intelligent and best-read Christian that ever lived. I have no doubt he would have said, “Yes, there is fellowship among the saints. We shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. It will certainly be as true in heaven as it is on earth that we have fellowship one with another.” I have no doubt he believed that heaven was a place of a far clearer knowledge than any we possess below. He said so once—“Here I know in part, but there shall I know even as I am known.” Some Christians have entertained the idea that they shall gaze upon the various works of God in distant parts of His universe, and enjoy infinite happiness in beholding the manifold wisdom of God—very possible, and if it will conduce to their happiness, very probable. Perhaps Paul believed all that, but we do not know whether he did or not. Here it is plain that he gives us only one idea. He was a man of great mind, and much information, but here he gives us only one idea—for my part, one that perfectly satisfies me, and I think one which charms and fills to overflowing the heart of every believer. He describes the disembodied state as “to be with Christ.” A very exclusive idea! No, a very inclusive idea—for it takes in all the heaven which the largest mind can conceive. It does seem to omit a great many things, but I dare say Paul felt that they were such trifles that it did not matter about forgetting them.

Being with Christ is so great a thing that he mentioned only it. I think he did this first, because his love was so concentrated upon Christ that he could think of nothing else in connection with going away to heaven. There is a wife here, perhaps, and her husband has accepted an appointment in India. He has been gone a long time, and the years of his forced absence have been weary to her. She has had loving messages from him, and kind letters, but often she has sighed, and her heart has looked out of the windows towards the east, yearning for his return. But now she has received a letter entreating her to go to her husband, and without hesitation she has resolved to go. Now, if you ask her what she is going to India for, the reply will be, “I am going to my husband.” But she has a brother there. Yes, she will see him, but she does not tell you that—her great thought is that she is going to her husband. She has many old friends and companions there, but she is not drawn to the far-off land by desire for their company—she crosses the sea for the sake of her beloved. But her husband has a handsome estate there, and he is wealthy, and has a well-furnished house and many servants. Yes, but she never says, “I am going to see my husband’s home,” or anything of that kind. She is going to her husband. That is the all-absorbing objective. There may be other inducements to make the voyage, but to be with her beloved is the master reason of her journey. She is going to the man she loves with all her soul, and she is longing for the country, whatever that country may be, because he is there. It is so with the Christian, only enhanced in a tenfold degree. He does not say, “I am going to the songs of angels, and to the everlasting *chorales* of the sanctified,” but, “I am going to be with Jesus.” It would argue unchastity to Christ if that were not the first and highest thought. To come back to the figure, and it is one which Christ, Himself, would approve of, for He continually uses the metaphor of marriage in relation to Himself and the soul—if that woman did regard as the first thing in that journey out to the East, the sight of some other person, or the mere enjoyment of wealth and possessions, it would argue that she had little love to her husband, that she was not such a wife as she ought to be. And if it could be so that the Christian should have some higher thought than being with Christ, or some other desire worth mentioning in the same day with it, it would look as if he had not presented himself as a chaste virgin to Christ, to be His and His alone. I see, therefore, why Paul calls the disembodied state a being with Christ, because his love was all with his Lord.

And, no doubt, there was this further reason among others—he was persuaded that heaven could not be heaven if Christ was not there. Oh, to think of heaven without Christ! It is the same thing as thinking of hell—heaven without Christ? It is day without the sun, existing without life; feasting without food; seeing without light. It involves a contradiction in terms: heaven without Christ! Absurd! It is the sea

without water, the earth without its fields, the heavens without their stars. There cannot be heaven without Christ. He is the sum total of bliss, He is the fountain from which heaven flows, the element of which heaven is composed. Christ is heaven, and heaven is Christ. You can change the words, and make no difference in the sense. To be where Jesus is, is the highest imaginable bliss, and bliss away from Jesus is inconceivable to the child of God. If you were invited to a marriage feast, and you were to be the bride, and yet the bridegroom were not there—do not tell me about feasting. In vain they ring the bells till the church tower rocks and reels, in vain the dishes smoke and the red wine sparkles, in vain the guests shout and make merry. If the bride looks around her and sees no bridegroom, the dainties mock her sorrow, and the merriment insults her misery—such would a Christless heaven be to the saints. If you could gather together all conceivable joys, and Christ was absent, there would be no heaven to His beloved ones. Therefore it is that heaven is to be where Christ is—

*“To dwell with Christ, to feel His love,
Is the full heaven enjoyed above!
And the sweet expectation now,
Is the young dawn of heaven below.”*

And, beloved, just to be with Christ is heaven—that bare thing! Excuse my using such words; I only want to make the sense stronger. That bare thing—just to be with Christ is all the heaven a believer needs. The angels may be there or not, as they will, and the golden crowns and harps present or absent as may be, but if I am to be where Jesus is, I will find angels in His eyes, and crowns in every lock of His hair. To me the golden streets shall be my fellowship with Him, and the music of the harpers shall be the sound of His voice. Only to be near Him, to be with Him—this is all we need. The apostle does not say, “To be in heaven, which is far better.” No, but, “to be with Christ, which is far better,” and he adds no description—he leaves the thoughts just as they are, in all their majestic simplicity. “To be with Christ, which is far better.”

But what is it to be with Christ, beloved? In some sense we are with Christ now, for He comes to us. We are no strangers to Him. Even while we are in this body we have communion with Jesus, and yet it must be true that a higher fellowship is to come, for the apostle says that while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord. There is a sense in which, so long as we are here, we are absent from the Lord. One great saint used to say upon his birthday, that he had been so many years in banishment from the Lord. To abide in this lowland country, so far from the ivory palaces, is banishment at the very best. All that we can see of Christ here is through a glass darkly. Face to face is true nearness to Him, and that we have not reached as of yet.

What will it be, then, to be with Christ? Excuse me if I say it will be, first of all, exactly what it says, namely, to be with Him. I must repeat that word—it is heaven only to be with Him. It is not merely what comes out of being with Him, His company is heaven. Why, even to have seen Jesus in His flesh was a privilege—

*“I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He took little children like lambs to His fold
I should like to have been with Him then.
I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
‘Let the little ones come unto Me.’”*

I think I should have found a little heaven in gazing on that blessed form. But our text speaks of a different sort of being with Him, for there were people near Him here in body, which were a long way off from Him in spirit. The text speaks of being with Him in the spirit when the soul shall have shaken itself loose of the flesh and blood—and left all its slough behind it, and gone right away to bask in the glory of Jesus, to participate in the nature of Jesus and, best of all, to abide near His person, with the God-man Mediator, who is Lord of all.

Still, there will flow out of that nearness the following things among many others: we shall enjoy, first of all, a clearer vision of Him. Oh, we have not seen Him yet! Our views of Him are too dim to be worth calling sights. The eyes of faith have looked through a telescope and seen Him at a distance, and it has been a ravishing vision, but when the eyes of the soul shall really see Him—Him, and not another, Him for ourselves, and not another for us, oh, the sight! Is not the thought of it a burning coal of joy? The sight of His very flesh will charm us, His wounds, still fresh, the dear memorials of His passion still apparent. The perception of His soul will also delight us, for our soul will commune with His soul, and this is the soul of communion. The sight of His Godhead, so far as created spirit can see it, will also ravish us with joy.

And then we shall have a brighter knowledge of Him. Here we know in part—we know the names of His offices, we know what He has worked, we know what He is working for us. But there those offices will shine in their splendor, and we shall see all that He did for us in its real weight and value. We shall comprehend, then, the height and depth, and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, as we do not know it at this hour.

And with that will be a more intimate communion. Our soul will lean her head on Jesus’ bosom; our heart will get into His heart and hide herself in His wounds. What must it be to speak to Him, as our soul will speak to Him, as our spirit nature will commune with His inmost nature, His spirit speaking to our spirits without a veil between! We shall not see Him looking down from the windows, but we shall rest in His arms, in a far more intimate communion than any we can enjoy this side the grave. Today I see Him through the grating of my prison windows, and my heart is ready to leap out of my body. What will it be when His left hand shall be under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me!

And then, beloved, when we shall be with Him it will be unbroken fellowship. There will be no sin to blind our eyes to His charms, or to entice us away from His love. Blessed be God, there will be no Monday mornings to call us back to the world, but our sacred Sabbath will last on forever. Doubts, backslidings and spiritual chills will then be gone forever. No more shall we cry, “Have you seen Him whom my soul loves?” But we shall hold Him, and never let Him go. There will be no need, even, for the spirit to fall asleep, and so suspend its joy. It will find its true rest in constant communion with Jesus. It is possible to live in fellowship with Jesus here always, possible, but, oh, how few ever reach it! But there we shall all have reached it, the very lowest among us, and we shall be with the Lord forever.

And then we shall have a sight of His glory, and though I put this after a sight of Himself, yet, remember, our Lord thinks much of it. He prayed, “Father, I will that they, also, whom You have given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.” We have seen something of His shame, and have been partakers in the reproach that is poured upon His gospel, but we shall see Him then, with silver sandals on the feet that once were mired by the clay of earth, and a crown of gold upon the once thorn-pierced brow. We shall see Him when His hands shall gleam as with gold rings set with beryl, and look no more like a malefactor’s hand nailed to the cruel wood. Then shall we say—

*“His body like bright ivory
With sapphires overlaid,
His limbs like marble pillars
In golden sockets stayed.”*

Then, looking on His face we shall understand Solomon’s Song, when he said, “His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars; His voice is most sweet, yes, He is altogether lovely.” One would wish to leap right away out of this body to behold Him in His glory.

And then, beloved, we shall share in the glory too, for His joy will be our joy, His honor will be our honor. Our spirits which wrestled hard here below, and had to strive against a thousand outward enemies, and inward doubts and fears, will then be all light, joy, gladness, full of the life of God, and beaming with ecstatic bliss. The Lord grant us to know this in due season, and so we shall, if indeed, we are believers in Jesus. So you see Paul’s one idea was that he should be with Jesus. That was all; he cared little for anything else.

III. Very briefly, let us consider THE APOSTLE’S ESTIMATE OF THIS DISEMBODIED STATE. He says, “To be with Christ, *which is far better.*” Now, the Greek has a triple comparative. We could not say, “Far more better,” in our language, but that would be a fair translation. We will therefore read, “It is far rather preferable,” or it is much better to be with Christ away from the body, than it would be to abide here. Now, you must remember that Paul does not claim that the disembodied state is the highest condition of a believer, or the ultimate crown of his hopes. It is a state of perfection so far as it goes—the spirit is perfect, but the entire manhood is not perfect while the body is left to mold in the tomb. One half of the saint is left behind in the grave. Corruption, earth and worms have seized upon it, and the grand concluding day of our manifestation can only come when the redemption of the body is fully achieved. The fullness of our glory is the resurrection, for then the body will be united to our spirit, and perfected with it. At present the saints who are with Jesus are without their bodies, and are pure spirits. Their humanity is in that respect maimed. Only half their manhood is with Jesus. Yet even for that half of their manhood to be with Christ, is far better than for the whole of their being to be here in the best possible condition. Now, the apostle does not say that to be with Christ is far better than to be here and to be rich, young, healthy, strong, famous, great, or learned. Paul never thinks of putting those petty things into contrast with being with Christ. He had got above all that. There he was sitting chained in the dungeon, the poorest man in the emperor’s dominions, and often, I have no doubt—for he was getting on to be, “such an one as Paul the aged,” and wrote particularly about an old cloak he had left at Troas—often he felt rheumatic pains shooting through him. And he did not find this life to have many attractions of wealth or ease, though he might have had them if he had chosen them as his portion. He had given them all up and counted them as insignificant trifles, not to be mentioned at all, for Jesus’ sake. He is not speaking of the low joys of this world—he is far above such considerations. He means that to be with Christ is infinitely superior to all the joys of Christians. Anything that the most of Christians know about Christ, and heavenly joys and heavenly things, is very poor compared with being with Christ. But he meant more than that. He meant that the highest joys which the best taught believer can here possess are inferior to being with Christ. For, let me say, Paul was no obscure believer. He was a leader among the followers of Christ. Could he not say, “Thanks be unto God, who always makes us to triumph in every place”? He knew the graces of the Holy Spirit, he had them abundantly. He was head and shoulders above the most brilliant Christian here. He had the highest experience of any man out of heaven, and it was that which he contrasted with being with Christ. And he said that the most that we could get here of heavenly things was not to be compared with being with Christ. That was far, far, far better, and truly, brethren, so it is. Thanks be to God for all the mercies of the pilgrimage, for all the dropping manna, and the following stream, but oh, the wilderness with all its manna is nothing compared with the land that flows with milk and honey. Let the road be paved with mercy, it is not as sweet as the Father’s house of the many mansions to which it leads. It is true that in the battle our head is covered, the wings of angels often protect us, and the Spirit of God nerves our arm to use the sword. But who shall say that the victory is not better than the battle? The warrior who has won the most of victory will tell you that the best day will be when the sword rattles back into the scabbard, and the victory is won forever. Oh, the wooing of Christ and the soul, this is very sweet. The rapturous joys we have had in the love-making between Christ and us, we would not exchange with emperors and kings, even if they offered us their crowns. But the marriage day will be better by far, the glorious consummation of our soul’s highest desire, when we shall be with our Well-beloved where He is. Far better, said the apostle, and he meant it; far better it is.

He did not say—and I want you to notice this again—though he might have said it, “We shall be better in condition; no poverty there, no sickness there.” He did not say, “We shall be better in character.” He might have said it, for there will be no sin, no depravity, no infirmity, no temptation there. He did not say, “We shall be better in employment,” though surely it will be better to wait on the Master, close at His hand, than to be here among sinners, and often among cold-hearted saints. He did not say, “We shall have better society there.” Though, truth to tell, it will be better to be with the perfect than with the imperfect. Neither did he say we should see fairer sights there, though we shall see the city that has founda-

tions of jasper, whose light is the light of the Lamb’s own presence. But he did say, “To be with Christ.” He summed it up there. The bare being with Christ would be far better. And so it will be. Our spirit longs for it.

Yet mark you, for all that, he said he felt a pull the other way. He had a twitch towards staying on earth, as well as a pull towards going to heaven, for he said, “To abide in the flesh is more necessary for you.” How I love Paul for thinking of the churches here when he had heaven before him. Anthony Fardindon says it is like a poor beggar woman outside the door, and she carries a squalling child, and someone says, “You may come in and feast, but you must leave the baby outside.” She is very hungry, and she needs the feast, but she does not want to leave the baby, and so she is in a strait betwixt two. Or, he says again, it is like a wife who has children at home, five or six little ones, and her husband is on a journey. And suddenly there comes a letter which says that he needs her, and she must go to him, but she may do as she thinks best. She desires to go to her husband, but who will take care of the last little baby, and who is to see to all the rest? And so she is in a strait betwixt two; she loves him, and she loves them. So stood the apostle, and oh, it is blessed to think of a man having such a love for Christ that for Christ’s sake he loves poor souls well enough to be willing to stay out of heaven for a while! “Oh,” he says, “it is all gain for me to go to heaven; for me to die is far better. Yet there are some poor sinners who need to be called, some poor trembling saints to be comforted, and I do not know which the best is.” And the apostle stands puzzled; he does not know which it shall be. There we leave him. May we get into the same blessed predicament ourselves!

The last word shall be this. Concerning our beloved friends gone from us, we do not sorrow as those who are without hope. What is more, we do not sorrow at all. If we chance to sorrow, it is for ourselves, that we have lost their present company, but as for them, it is far better with them. And if the lifting of our little finger could bring them back again, dear as they are to us, we would not be so cruel as to subject them, again, to the troubles of this stormy sea of life. They are safe; we will go to them. We would not have them return to us.

Then, with regard to ourselves, if we have believed in Jesus we are on our journey home, and all fear of death is now annihilated. You notice the apostle does not say anything at all about death. He did not think it worth mentioning; in fact, there is no such thing to a Christian. I have heard of people being afraid of the pains of death. There are no pains of death—the pain is in life. Death is the end of pain. It is all over. Put the saddle on the right horse. Do not blame death for what he does not do. It is life that brings pain. Death to the believer ends all evil. Death is the gate of endless joy, and shall we dread to enter there? No, blessed be God, we will not.

And this points us to the fountain of bliss while we are here, for if heaven is to be with Christ, then the nearer we get to Christ, here, the more we shall participate in that which makes the joy of heaven. If we want to taste heaven’s blessed dainties while here below, let us walk in unbroken fellowship with Him—so we shall get two heavens, a little heaven below, and a boundless heaven above when our turn shall come to go home. Oh, I wish you were all on the way to being with Christ. If you do not go to be with Christ, where can you go? Answer that question, and go to Jesus now by humble faith, that afterwards He may say, “Come, you did come on earth, now come again, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PHILIPPIANS 1.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—872, 847, 879, 846

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